

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8339

E.O. 11652: GIDS
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: CURRENT STATUS OF NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY

REFS: (A) STATE 294883, (B) TEL AVIV 6730

1. SINCE THE DEATH IN 1970 OF ITS LONG-TIME AND UNDISPUTED LEADER, MOSHE CHAIM SHAPIRA, THE FACTIONS OF THE NRP HAVE HANDICAPPED THE PARTY IN ITS EFFORTS TO FUNCTION AS A COHERENT POLITICAL FORCE. THE PARTY HAS ALWAYS BEEN FACTION-RIDDEN BUT SHAPIRA HAD KEPT THEM IN CHECK. THE PARTY HAS SEVEN IDENTIFIABLE FACTIONS: (A) BURG-LAMIFNEH; (B) RAPHAEL-LIKUD V'TMURAH; (C) WARHAFTIG-CENTRAL; (D) YOUTH; (E) MOSHAVIM; (F) HAKIBBUTZ HADATI; AND (G) RELIGIOUS WOMEN. THE FIRST FOUR CONTROL SOME 86 PERCENT OF THE VOTES WITHIN THE PARTY AND HAVE RECOGNIZABLE PARTY-WIDE LEADERSHP; THE LATTER THREE ARE BASED ON MORE NARROW, PAROCHIAL INTERESTS WITH LITTLE INFOUENCE EXCEPT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNAL PARTY POLICIES.

2. IN THE LAST PARTY ELECTIONS (1972) THE BURG FACTION PULLED 28 PERCENT; RAPHAEL, 24 PERCENT; YOUTH, 20 PERCENT; AND WARHAFTIG RECEIVED 13.7 PERCENT. THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT THERE WILL BE ANOTHER PARTY ELECTION BEFORE NEXT YEAR'S KNESSET ELECTIONS BECAUSE, INTER ALIA, THE MANY OPPONENTS OF RAPHAEL FEAR THAT HE WOULD GAIN, OR AT LEAST HOLD HIS OWN, IN ANOTHER POLLING. DESPITE HIS UNPOPULARITY WITH THE PARTY, A MAJOR SOURCE OF RAPHAEL'S STRENGTH IS THE PATRONAGE HE CONTROLS AS MINISTER OF RELIGION. ALTHOUGH AMBITIOUS AND A GOOD SPEAKER, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CONTROVERSY REGARDING YITZHAK RAPHAEL'S PAST (ALLEGATIONS REGARDING SHADY BUSINESS DEALS) AND MANY NRP MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT HE REFLECTS POORLY ON THE PARTY. IN RECENT MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN A

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COALESCING OF FACTIONS AIMED AT ISOLATING RAPHAEL. HE IS

ANATHEMA TO MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE ZVULUN HAMMER, ONE OF THE YOUTH FACTION LEADERS, AND IS GENERALLY OBJECTIONABLE TO MOST NRP MEMBERS OUTSIDE HIS OWN FACTION.

3. WARHAFTIG'S CENTRAL FACTION HAS RECENTLY MERGED WITH THE YOUTH FACTION AND AN UNDERSTANDING HAS NOW BEEN REACHED BETWEEN YOUTH/WARHAFTIG AND (THE TITULAR HEAD OF THE PARTY) JOSEF BURG TO UNITE IN OPPOSITION TO RAPHAEL. IN THIS THEY WILL PROBABLY BE JOINED BY THE THREE MINOR FACTIONS. THE OCCASION FOR THE SHOWDOWN WITH RAPHAEL WILL PROBABLY BE AT A MEETING OF THE NRP CENTRAL COMMITTEE EARLY NEXT YEAR. WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED INCONFIDENCE BY ARYE HAHN, NRP PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, THAT THERE ARE ENOUGH VOTES TO TOPPLE RAPHAEL FROM HIS POSITION OF LEADERSHIP. IF THE EFFORT IS UNSUCCESSFUL, THERE IS A STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT THE YOUTH FACTION WILL SPLIT FROM THE NRP. HAHN, WHO SUPPORTS THE YOUTH FACTION, BELIEVES THAT RAPHAEL'S PRESENCE ON THE NRP TICKET COSTS THE PARTY MANY VOTES. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE LOSS OF TWO NRP SEATS IN THE 1973 ELECTION WAS DUE TO THE REVULSION OF MANY NRP VOTERS TOWARD RAPHAEL.

4. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE YOUTH FACTION, NONE OF THE NRP FACTIONS DIFFER FROM ONE ANOTHER, SIGNIFICANTLY ON THE QUESTION OF TERRITORIES OR ON THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS VS. TERRITORIAL ISSUES. THERE ARE DOVES SPRINKLED AMONG THESE FACTIONS, BUT PERSONALITIES PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN DIFFERENTIATING THE FACTIONS THAN DOES IDEOLOGY. THEY ALL END TO GIVE GREATER WEIGHT TO THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN ISRAELI SOCIETY--THUS THEY AGREE THAT PARTICIPATION IN A COALITION GOVERNMENT WHEREIN THE NRP CAN VETO ATTEMPTS AT GREATER SECULARIZATION SHOULD BE THE MAJOR AIM OF THE PARTY. THE TERRITORIAL ISSUE IS SECONDARY TO THIS PURPOSE, AND CONSEQUENTLY THESE FACTIONS WOULD HESITATE LONG OVER QUITTING A COALITION OVER A DIFFERENCE WITH THE LABOR ALIGNMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, ON TERRITORIAL RETROCESSION. THEY BELIEVE THAT RELIGIOUS INTERESTS ARE BEST SERVED BY MAINTAINING THE NRP'S "HISTORIC RELATIONSHIP" WITH THE LABOR PARTY. THIS CONSIDERATION TRANSLATES INTO MODERATION AND PRAGMATISM ON NON-RELIGIOUS ISSUES.

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5. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE YOUTH FACTION--THE MOST DYNAMIC, IF NOT THE BIGGEST, WING OF THE NRP AND THE ONE WITH THE LARGEST FOLLOWING OUTSIDE THE NRP MEMBERSHIP--IS FAR LESS COMMITTED TO A POLICY OF BEING IN THE GOVERNMENT AT ALL COSTS, AND IT PLACES GREATER EMPHASIS ON RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK. THERE ARE HAWKS IN ALL THE FACTIONS, BUT MOST ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE YOUTH FACTION. FORMALLY AT LEAST, THEY OPPOSE YIELDING ANY PART OF HISTORIC ERETZ YISRAEL.

THERE ARE ALSO SOME MODERATES IN THE YOUTH FACTION, ATTRACTED TO ITS BACKING OF ORGANIZATIONAL REFORM OF THE PARTY. THE YOUTH FACTION FAVORS A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY OT INCLUDE THE LIKUD, AND MANY IN THE FACTION WOULD EVEN PREFER JOINING A LIKUD-DOMINATED COALITION. AS A COMPONENT OF THE NRP, THE YOUTH FACTION PROBABLY ATTRACTS MANY GUSH EMUNIM VOTES FOR THE PARTY. MANY OTHER GUSH EMUNIM VOTERS TEND TO SUPPORT THE LIKUD BECAUSE, AMONG OTHER REASONS, THEY LACK CONFIDENCE IN THE NRP'S COMMITMENT TO HOLDING THE WEST BANK. SHOULD THE YOUTH FACTION BREAK AWAY FROM THE NRP, IT COULD PROBABLY COUNT ON THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE GUSH EMUNIM, AND THE RUMP NRP WOULD PROBABLY EMERGE AS A WEAK SISTER TO THE NEW PARTY. DUNNIGAN

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